

MTUPP HARM REDUCTION POLICY

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Background:

The tobacco industry is quite aware of smokers' increasing concern about the health effects of smoking, as well as the public's increasing intolerance of secondhand smoke. Harm Reduction is a term used by the tobacco industry to sanitize attempts to continue addiction to tobacco products. Harm reduction marketing is going on now and is controlled entirely by the tobacco companies. The industry continues to introduce new products under the guise that well-known harm associated with exposure to tobacco products would somehow be mitigated by these new products.

- Tobacco companies are introducing many so-called "reduced risk" products;
- Tobacco companies are making claims of health benefits for these products;
- No evidence exists that any of these products will reduce the risk of disease in individuals.

Contrary to the tobacco companies' proposition, the use of "light" cigarettes is associated with a decreased chance to stop smoking. ⁽¹⁾ The underlying argument for "harm reduction" is that it is impossible to dramatically reduce tobacco consumption and that a substantial number of people will continue to smoke no matter what the public health community does. However, in the 2005 Montana Adult Tobacco Survey, 61% of cigarette smokers reported that they were considering quitting in the next six months.

Harm reduction supporters promote spit-tobacco as a replacement for smoking cigarettes. This is not, of course, harm reduction, but rather tobacco use maintenance. Tobacco maintenance products encourage users to continue harmful addiction. There is ample evidence that spit-tobacco contains nicotine, one of the most powerfully addictive drugs known. The simple truth is: cessation is healthy, maintenance is harmful.

The best public health policy is Primary Prevention. Eliminating exposure to tobacco products prevents disease. Because spit tobacco use is linked with oral, esophageal and stomach cancers as well as tooth and gum disease; and may be a risk factor for heart disease, it needs to be eliminated. Substituting one disease-causing agent for another is not a healthy choice and certainly not prudent public health practice.

Policy:

Encouraging disease-causing behaviors through the so called "harm reduction" strategy endangers the health of the public. It is an imprudent and unnecessary threat to public health efforts aimed at reducing the toll of death and disease caused by tobacco use. The Montana Tobacco Use Prevention Program (MTUPP) does not advocate "harm reduction" in tobacco prevention. It is the MTUPP policy to promote avoidance of

commercial tobacco products as well as cessation for persons who currently use these unhealthful products.

Decreasing the risk of harm from tobacco products can be accomplished by creating an environment that supports tobacco cessation and prevents tobacco initiation.

(1) Am J Public Health. 2006; 96: 1498-1504